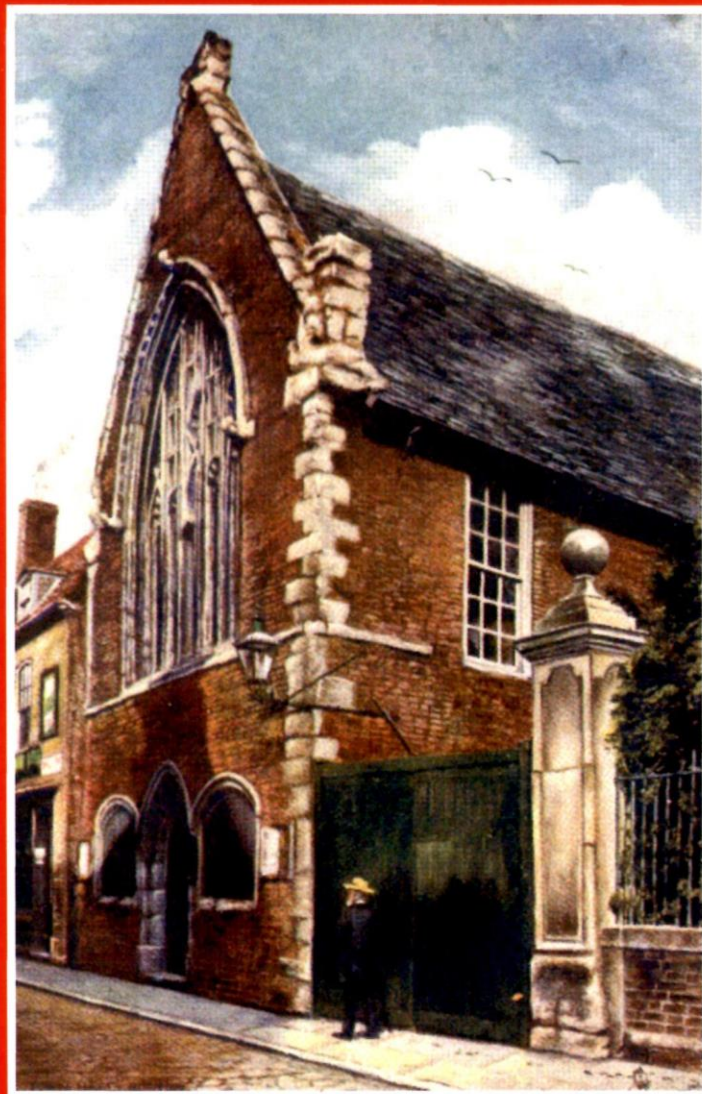


Boston St Mary's Guildhall A History



The town of Boston

The name 'Boston' is believed to derive from 'Botolphstone'. According to tradition St. Botolph, an Anglo-Saxon monk, established a monastery here during the 7th Century, but there is no evidence to support this. Boston is not even specifically mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086, (although nearby Skirbeck is). Yet by the late 13th Century Boston had developed into a major trading port with its customs dues for wool, the major export commodity, being almost 40% of those for the whole country. This prominence attracted four friaries to the town, to serve the large changing population.

The town came to serve as an out port for Lincoln after the first town bridge and sluice were built in 1142, thus impeding the flow of seagoing vessels to the City. As the Fosseydyke, which connected the rivers Trent and Witham, had already been cleared in 1121, Boston was in effect quickly able to become the main port for the East Midlands. Between 1280 and 1290 the fleeces of about three million sheep, many from the large monastic flocks, were shipped through Boston each year and in 1369 the Wool Staple, which was more or less an exclusive licence to trade granted by the Crown, was moved from Lincoln to Boston.

Boston's supremacy as an international trading port was further boosted by the presence of the Hanseatic League, which was an association of merchants from towns in northern Germany and the Baltic that established headquarters in the town. This would have given the town a very cosmopolitan atmosphere. The Hanseatic merchants, often known as 'Easterlings', were given special trading privileges by the English crown. Goods which were imported through Boston in the 12th and 13th Centuries included furs, falcons, cloths and wines from northern Europe and France and luxury items from the Mediterranean countries, such as spices, glass, silk, wax, figs and currants.

Early medieval Boston was bounded on the east side by a ditch or tidal drain called the Barditch which also acted as the town's sewer! As the town prospered, the population grew and houses began to be built outside the Barditch and west of the river. The centre of the town still retains much of its medieval street pattern with thoroughfares like Wormgate, Church Street, and Dolphin Lane continuing to follow their original courses.

Boston's ascendancy as a port led to the building of the present magnificent parish church of St. Botolph's, (affectionately known as the 'Stump'), which was begun in 1309. The Stump is the largest parish church in England with its majestic tower standing 272 feet tall and visible for miles around. The foundation stone was laid by Dame Margery Tilney who

'gave 5 li Sterling, as alsoe Sir John Truesdale the Parson, and Rich. Stevenson A marchant of Boston.....'

Much of the commercial life of the town centred on its internationally important fairs. The Boston fair, first mentioned in 1125 and well-established by the 1170s, became one of the most popular in Europe. For some time during the 13th Century, London's Court of Hustings was even suspended during the fair to allow members and those with business at the court to attend. At this time a Pie Power Court existed on site to settle disputes between buyers and sellers, to check weights and measures and to make judgement about the quality of goods. In addition to the annual fair, a charter permitting weekly markets was granted in 1308. Markets, (held on Wednesdays and Saturdays), continue to be a feature of life in Boston to this day. Tangible evidence, too, of prosperous medieval merchant activity remains in the town in the presence of Hussey and Rochford towers and Pescod Hall.

By the end of the 14th Century trade in Boston was already in decline and this continued during the next two centuries. There were various reasons for this including a reduction in the export of raw

wool and a lessening of the involvement of the Hanseatic League and its eventual withdrawal after the murder in the town of a foreign merchant in 1470. In 1592 Queen Elizabeth I gave the Corporation relief from taxes as the

'borough of Boston is in greate parte thereof depopulated and such inhabitants as there remayinge are muche decayed and impoverised and very fewe of any hability'

In 1545 the Duke of Richmond, who held Boston east of the river, died and the honour of Richmond reverted to the Crown. This created the opportunity to establish the free borough of Boston, albeit relatively late in its history considering its importance as a centre of medieval trade. So, by Henry VIII's charter of 14 May 1545, Boston was incorporated, with the right to appoint two M.P.s, a mayor, twelve aldermen and eighteen common councillors, plus its own recorder and town clerk, as well as to hold markets and fairs.

In later years, Boston experienced fluctuating fortunes. Although the great prominence and wealth of the 13th Century have never been experienced again, the town enjoyed a new era of more modest prosperity during the 18th and early 19th Centuries. By the mid 18th Century a series of turnpike trusts were improving road communications in the area. Moreover, in 1766/7 the Grand Sluice was completed so enabling both improvements in water transport and the draining of large areas of fenland to the north and west of the town. Thousands of acres of fen were drained during this period, many as a result of the efforts of Joseph Banks, the squire of Revesby and one time



A colour postcard of the former Sheep Market in Wide Bargate, Boston. Boston Borough Council, Museum Collection.

Recorder of Boston, whose portrait hangs in the Guildhall and who achieved international fame as an explorer, botanist and President of the Royal Society. This revival in commercial activity resulted in six banks being opened in the town. Substantial warehouse buildings, too, were built during this period, and Fydell House, the building adjacent to the Guildhall which Pevsner described as the 'Grandest House in Town', was built and later taken over in 1726 by the Fydells, a prominent merchant family.

A period of decline followed and this was not immediately reversed by the arrival of the railways. The first rail links to pass through Boston, the East Lincolnshire Railway, which connected Boston and Grimsby, and a 'loop line' off the Great Northern Railway that passed from London to York, were both opened in 1848. But in the first few decades that followed, Grimsby, whose new docks were funded by the rail companies, boomed at the expense of Boston and other Lincolnshire towns. It was only after Boston's own docks were completed in 1884, together with the implementation of the Witham Outfall Improvement Act, 1880 that Boston enjoyed a further period of economic revival. By this time, a number of prominent industrial concerns had developed, including the famous Howden and Tuxford engineering businesses. Many of the present houses in the town were built at this time.



A view of Boston from across the water in 1823. Detail taken from a painting by the artist John Daulton. *Boston Borough Council, Museum Collection.*

The Guild of St. Mary the Blessed Virgin

St. Mary's Guild, who built the present Guildhall, became the richest and most prominent of Boston's guilds and its members included many of the town's merchants and traders at a time when the town itself was enjoying great prosperity.

Guilds like those of St. Mary's were fundamentally religious in inspiration. It was accepted that life is but a passing phase and that Man's true destiny lies in the world to come. One of the Guild's foremost purposes was therefore to provide masses for the souls of their deceased members.

The reply to the King's writ of enquiry of 1389 states that St. Mary's Guild was founded in 1260 by Andrew de Gote, Walter Tumby, Galfried de la Gotere, Robert Leland and Hugh Spayne. Its objectives included the maintaining of two priests in the parish church to say daily masses for the benefit of all members living and dead, to burn wax candles before the altar of the Blessed Virgin and to bear torches at the funerals of Guild members. A thousand loaves and a thousand herrings were to be distributed annually amongst the poor of the town. St. Mary's was open to anyone, male or female, who was prepared to take the strict oaths of admission and pay an initial fee of 6s 8d and an annual subscription of 1s.

St. Mary's Guild played a prominent part in the rebuilding of the parish church. Its own chapel was located in a prime position inside the south aisle of the new St. Botolph's. The interior of St. Botolph's would have looked very different from today and the Guild's chapel would have been screened off and have had biblical scenes and representations of the saints painted on its walls. Some features of the old chapel are, however, still evident including a carved piscina, a sedilia and an aumbry.

The Guild also appears to have founded a choir school which later

developed into the Grammar School. It is mentioned in 1329 that the school was looking for a master or tutor. The oldest of the present Grammar School buildings, though, dates from 1567.

St Mary's Guild was incorporated in 1392 by licence from the Crown and this enabled it to hold land and property in perpetuity. Recent dendrochronology tests suggest that the Guild's hall was built almost immediately in response to this licence.

During the medieval period most people were illiterate and relied on the clergy to interpret the word of God and tell them how to obtain salvation. Guarantees of such salvation came to be linked to bequests of money, land and property. Numerous gifts were made to St. Mary's. Thus, for example, in 1393 Margaret Tilney gave a house and land on the east of the river and in 1447 Richard Benyon and others gave five dwellings, thirty-one acres of land and ten acres of pasture in Boston and Skirbeck.

The increasing popularity of the Guild not only encouraged many such gifts but grew further as a result of indulgences that it was able to secure in the 15th and early 16th Centuries from respective Popes. These ranged from 100 days remission from penance for all guild members who were present whenever mass was celebrated aloud, with music, in the chapel of St. Mary (granted in 1401) to 500 years of absolution for those who paid their subscription fees and attended their chapel in St. Botolph's at Easter, Whitsun, etc. (granted in 1506). These indulgences clearly made the Guild more attractive to would-be members.

By the beginning of the 16th Century St. Mary's Guild was both influential and prosperous and counted many of the town's most important citizens amongst its members. During the 1520s it even achieved a measure of national fame through the choir it supported at St. Botolph's and its connection with John Taverner. Taverner, a well-known composer, came to Boston late in his life and there is a memorial stone to him under the tower of the parish church. By

now the Guild had apparently also acquired many sacred relics and miraculous objects including a finger of St. Anne set in a hand of silver and gold, a silver and gilt case containing a part of the stone of Calvary, and even a silver and gilt case, surmounted by an image of the Virgin and Child, which contained some of the milk of Our Lady! Needless to say, such powerful relics and objects made the Guild's chapel at St. Botolph's a popular centre of pilgrimage.

In 1533 the Guild produced an inventory which is now on display in the Guildhall that gives a vivid and detailed picture of its buildings and furnishings. The inventory includes a list of the contents of the 'Chantry House', which provided accommodation for the Guild chaplains and was situated in South End near the site of the present Grammar School, of 'St. Mary's House' (i.e. the Guildhall) and of the chapel and vestry of Our Lady at St. Botolph's. It shows that the Guild had many valuable objects including hangings and banners, books, fine cloths, richly embroidered vestments and items of gold, silver and gilt, as well as the sacred relics already referred to.

Despite their wealth and influence, no Boston Guilds could survive the reigns of Henry VIII and his son Edward VI. After Boston was itself incorporated in 1545 various officials of St. Mary's Guild became aldermen and councillors of the new Corporation so helping to ensure a strong sense of continuity in the affairs of the town. Almost immediately, all of the Guild's property passed to the Corporation. The religious functions of St. Mary's survived, but only until the first Parliament of the stridently Protestant regime that emerged under Edward VI which effectively abolished all chantries and guilds. Edward's Act for the Dissolution of Chantries aimed to end

'the superstition and errors in Christian religion (which) hath been brought into the minds and estimation of men by reason of the ignorance of their very true and perfect salvation.....by devising and phantasising vain opinions of purgatory and masses satisfactory to be done for them which be departed.....'

Unfortunately, the former Guild's property was confiscated under Edward VI and it was only after a period of some turmoil that Boston Corporation finally had the opportunity to acquire some of it, including the Guildhall, for good in 1555.

Right: Original stained glass window in the Banqueting Hall

Below: Boston Guildhall Council Chamber. The 1533 Inventory, Charter of Incorporation 1545 and the receipts for the Manor of Boston are on display in the Council Chamber.



Civic functions and changes to the building during the 16th and 17th Centuries

The Guildhall, which is one of the earliest surviving brick built buildings in Lincolnshire, was, after 1545, soon established as the centre of civic life in Boston and remained so until relatively recent times. In fact, every mayor of the town was elected in the building from Nicholas Robinson (or Robertson), who resigned as warden of St. Mary's Guild to take up the post in 1545, through to William Weightman in 1887.

Once the Guildhall became the Town Hall ongoing changes were put in place which removed or masked much of the building's medieval fabric. Pishey Thompson, writing in 1856, claimed that

'the interior of the building is so completely modernised that nothing of the original but the construction of the roof is visible.....'

This may be largely but not entirely true as, for example, there is evidence of blocked doorways on the south elevation. In recent years, however, we have learned a little more of its earlier life. When part of the modern ground floor was lifted for the installation of the new heating system, the remains of a series of low brick walls running across the building were discovered. These would have supported timber framed partitions, which have long since been removed, and give some indication of how the ground floor in the medieval period would have been divided up. The same work provided answers as to how the first floor was originally reached and suggests that some of the downstairs rooms would have had finely decorated tiled floors.

The Corporation Records, which largely survive, date back to the incorporation of the Borough in 1545, and provide us with much of the information we have about changes to the building since that

time and to its civic use. These records contain various references during the 16th and 17th Centuries to cellars under the town hall. These are, though, unlikely to refer to below ground cellars, as there is no evidence of these, and almost certainly to the ground floor space itself. It seems unlikely that this floor was ever used for any civic or formal function during this period, merely for the kitchens and storage, as well as the holding of prisoners.

There is an interesting reference in the records for 1583 which suggests that the linenfold doors at the western end of the Council Chamber began to be used as the deed cupboard at that time after the room had been repaired and after the mayor, Henry Ash, had returned the Treasury Chest from his home!

There is also evidence that the building had long been used for civic entertainment. Thus, for example, there are references from the 1660s to show that the Guildhall was used for May Day dinners and, on one occasion at least, for the mayor elect to entertain.

One particularly interesting mayor during this period was Atherton Hough, who was elected in 1628 and was also a church warden. It was he who, in this very Puritan town, damaged the statue of St. Botolph, which still stands on a pinnacle on the parish church tower, because he believed it looked like the Pope!



1764 The Oak Doors, Guildhall, Boston
Photograph of the oak doors to the linenfold cupboard in the Council Chamber. Boston Borough Council, Museum Collection.

The Pilgrim Fathers and Puritans in Boston and Beyond

In 1607, members of the Separatist group, which later became known as the Pilgrim Fathers, came down the river Witham to Boston where they had arranged to meet with a sea captain who was to take them to Holland where they expected to enjoy the greater religious freedom that that country offered. For reasons which are unclear, however, the sea captain, instead of taking them to freedom, betrayed them and they stood accused of leaving the country without the King's permission. Members of the group, led by William Brewster, were brought before the magistrates in the Guildhall, which was by now not only used as a place of assembly for public business but also for the Quarter Sessions for the Borough. Some were imprisoned pending a trial at the Assizes.

There has, over the years, been speculation as to whether the group was then incarcerated in the town's gaol in the market place or in the Guildhall itself. We do know from the Corporation Records that the Guildhall had some facilities for holding prisoners, although these are unlikely to be the present cells, at least as they now appear, as in 1552

'it was ordered that the kitchens under the Town Hall (i.e. the Guildhall) and the chambers over them should be prepared for a prison, and a dwelling house for one of the serjeants'.

We also know from an account by the young William Bradford, a member of the group who went on to serve as the Governor of Plymouth Colony almost every year between 1621 and 1656, that the Separatists were treated tolerably well in the town in which there were many Puritan sympathisers including some among its leading citizens. If they were given special treatment by magistrates who were reluctant to hold them it is unlikely that this would have been in

the common gaol and much more likely to have been in the Guildhall. The lack of any surviving records which throw more light on this does unfortunately mean, however, that we will never be sure. Either way, the Pilgrim Fathers were eventually discharged and they were returned to their homes in Nottinghamshire and north Lincolnshire. They succeeded in reaching Holland the following year by another route and later sailed from Plymouth in the Mayflower for the New World in 1620.

As has been indicated, Boston had a strong Puritan element by the time of the Pilgrim Fathers episode. Unlike the Separatists, who no longer wanted to be part of the established Church, the Puritans sought to 'purify' the Church from within. In most other respects, though, they had a similar outlook. Boston had been the birthplace in 1517 of John Foxe who had been in the vanguard of nonconformity and whose 'Book of Martyrs', first published in English in 1563, had a major influence on both Puritans and Separatists.

In 1612 the Puritan John Cotton was appointed as vicar of Boston. He was certainly not the first vicar of St. Botolph's to display such tendencies as in the 1580s the then incumbent, James Worshippe, was one of around twenty Lincolnshire clergy who had petitioned against customs such as the use of the prayer book, administering sacraments, wearing the surplice and the use of wedding rings. Cotton, however, who some regarded as the leading Puritan thinker in England, acted like a magnet and attracted many sympathisers to the town, thus making Boston even more of a centre of Puritanism.

Cotton, who had a charismatic personality, ran into a succession of difficulties with the church authorities and this eventually led him and some 10% of the population (about 250 souls) of the town, including many of its leading citizens, to leave in 1630 and 1633 to be part of the new settlement of Boston, Massachusetts (which, it is said, was so named in honour of Cotton).

Many of these migrants, as prominent Bostonians, had direct

connections with the Guildhall. These included Atherton Hough, Thomas Leverett, a Boston alderman, Richard Bellingham, a former Boston M.P. and Recorder, and Francis Bernard, a deputy Recorder. Moreover, men from old Boston went on to be Governor of Massachusetts during the early years of the new colony. These were Bellingham and Bernard as well as Thomas Dudley, steward to the Earl of Lincoln, Simon Bradstreet, Dudley's son-in-law, and John Leverett, son of Thomas Leverett.

John Cotton, himself, became very influential in the formation of both the religious and civil institutions of the new colony. Moreover, although he was now separated from old Boston by the Atlantic Ocean, he continued to have influence in England and to maintain contact with one of his great admirers, Oliver Cromwell, who also had a significant local connection. Cromwell and his troops first entered Lincolnshire during April 1643 when, assisted by Sir Anthony Irby, who was representing Boston as an M.P. and whose Hall stood west of the river immediately opposite the Stump, he soon took Crowland. After further successes, he encountered a major Royalist army in the north of the county and was forced to retreat first to Lincoln and then to Boston. He lodged at the Three Tuns Inn, which stood on the corner of Church Lane and the Market Place, and barracked his troops in the parish church.

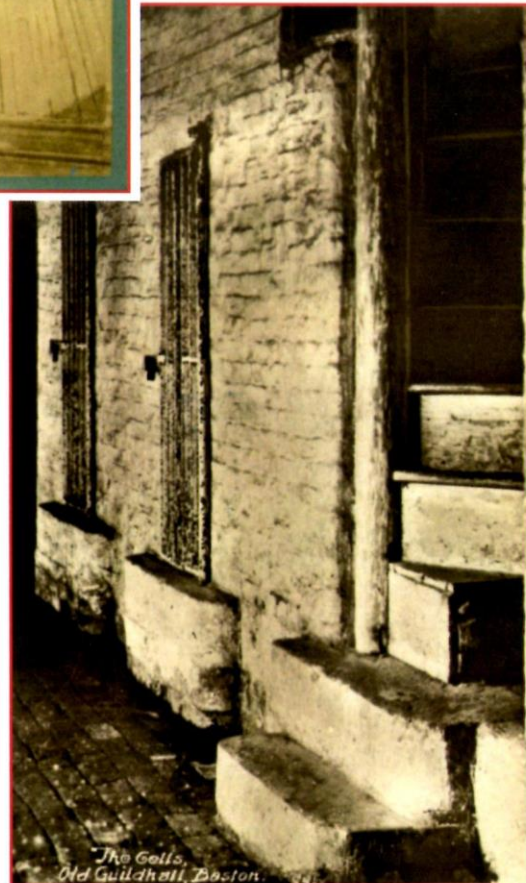
Boston was, by now, a strategic Parliamentary town. When the Earl of Manchester, the leader of the Eastern Association, arrived in Boston, Cromwell and his troops were ordered north to meet up with Sir Thomas Fairfax. Upon being forced to withdraw back to Boston once more, Cromwell wrote for a second time an indignant and very emotional letter to Parliament pointing out that his troops had still not been paid! The Parliamentary forces left Boston on 9 October 1643 to relieve Bolingbroke Castle but received some intelligence that a Royalist army from Newark was heading their way via Horncastle. The two armies met at Winceby on 11 October. The outcome was a decisive and important victory for Cromwell, Fairfax and the forces of Parliament.



Drawing of Boston Guildhall Courtroom.

The text in the drawing reads "Which was dismantled in 1898 reconstructed from recollections of the old inhabitants by G.E.Hackford, 1907"

**Artist - G.E. Hackford, 1907.
Boston Borough Council, Museum Collection.**



**Photograph of the cells. The stairs from the Court Room to the cell area are also visible in this image.
Boston Borough Council, Museum Collection.**

Civic use and alterations to the building since the end of the 17th Century

The 18th Century witnessed great changes to the fabric of the building. The Corporation Records refer to a new chimney stack being installed in 1717, which is likely to have been one in the Banqueting Hall, and to another in 1747, which might have been the other one in the same room or the one in the Council Chamber. The present main staircase to the first floor, which is to the east of the medieval stair structure, was erected in 1731. Sash windows were installed in 1722 including

*'next to the Aldermen's seat on the south side of convenient
bigness on the place of the old decay'd windows there'*

and on the north side of the building in 1730. Also, in 1722 boilers and dressers and other convenient items for the kitchen were installed and the kitchen paved.

The Council Chamber was greatly altered in the mid 18th Century and was formalised by the inclusion of four matching doorways with eight-panel doors, one of which was false and included merely for the sake of symmetry. Other 18th Century changes included the lengthening of the spits in the kitchen chimney so that they could be turned on the outside of the wall, the making of two new closets in the Jury Chamber under the Music Loft and the removal of the outside shutters and their being placed inside.

In more recent years the external iron gates with the Borough's coat of arms were put up in 1914 and replaced a single large wooden door which had long sealed off a discarded right of way, known as Bedesman's Lane.

At the beginning of the 18th Century the Guildhall was the centre

of the civic, administrative and social life of the Borough. Gradually, however, this changed as it ceased to be the only notable public building in Boston. As early as 1732 social gatherings were also held in the hall over the Butter Cross in the Market Place and in 1822 the town's new Assembly Rooms were built. Moreover, in 1840 the Quarter Sessions for Kirton and New Holland were moved to the new Sessions House and the court room moved out of the Guildhall. The sessions for Kirton and Skirbeck, together with those for Boston (since the 16th Century), had been held in the building since 1660. Much of the administrative work of the Borough was transferred to the Corporation Buildings in the Market Place after these were opened in the 1770s and, after 1887, mayoral elections took place in the Assembly Rooms. In 1904 the Corporation moved most of its activities to the new purpose-built Municipal Buildings in West Street.

Despite its diminishing public role, the Guildhall continued to play an important part in the life of the town. In 1889 the newly elected Holland County Council met in the building for the first time. Also, the Guildhall continued to serve as a social centre, as it had done throughout its long history. The Corporation Records provide plenty of evidence for this, from May Day dinners in the 18th Century, to functions to celebrate major events such as the marriages of Queen Victoria (1840) and the Prince of Wales (1863) and the opening of the last section of the East Lincolnshire Railway to Boston (1848) in the 19th Century, to dinners and balls given by the Corporation and the town's M.P.s until well into the 20th Century.

The Municipal Corporations Act, 1835, resulted in the Guildhall being put in the charge of a charitable trust associated with the Grammar School. The trust was able to charge fees for the use of the



Boston Guildhall Banqueting Hall

building and this probably contributed to the moving of many civic and social functions elsewhere. The trust, however, appears to have rather neglected the maintenance of the building as it was said to be in a poor state of repair by the early years of the 20th Century, although modest repair works were carried out in 1912. During the 1920s the building was purchased from the trust by Frank Harrison, a local businessman, alderman and magistrate, and conveyed back to the Corporation.

In 1935 the Boston Preservation Trust was formed with the immediate object of saving Fyde House, which was threatened with demolition by property developers. The objects prescribed in the Trust's deeds of incorporation were, though, also designed to provide the wider future prospect of preserving generally the architectural and natural amenities of Boston and its surroundings. This has helped to develop an interest within the town of the historical and architectural importance of the Guildhall.

During the 20th Century the Guildhall found a new life as both a communal and British restaurant and a home for the town's museum.



Photograph entitled "Ancient Kitchen in the Town Hall". The fireplaces and the smoke jacks are clearly visible. *Boston Borough Council, Museum Collection*

National Kitchen and British Restaurant

Towards the end of the First World War the Corporation, aided by Government funding, established a National Kitchen in the Guildhall. During 1918 and 1919 free meals were provided for the needy and supplies of milk were given in many cases to expectant and nursing mothers. Evidently the Guildhall was considered a suitable venue for eating in as in 1918 a Lieutenant-Colonel Borrell even requested that it be used also for messing his troops. His request, though, was curtly rejected by the Council and he was told that

'there were several other large buildings in the town that might be available.....'

During the Second World War the Guildhall was used as a British Restaurant offering subsidised meals which did not require the need for food ration coupons. The restaurant, managed by Miss Nora Carter, offered nourishing three course lunchtime fare and regularly attracted between 200 and 400 people in a session. On one occasion it even apparently fed 1,000 soldiers who suddenly descended on it. The meals were prepared in the kitchen, with the dining rooms on the upper floor.

The idea for the restaurant was first proposed in 1941 with the intention that it would also cook meals for schools and other establishments in the Borough such as rest homes. These ideas were approved in 1942 and, after the appropriate equipment had been purchased, staff appointed and that part of the building previously occupied by the museum taken over, the restaurant was in operation before the end of the year.

Women from the Women's Voluntary Service were used to provide assistance in preparing tables and serving meals. The prices charged initially were: Soup – 2d; Meat and vegetables – 7d; Sweet – 2d; Tea or coffee – 1d. These prices, however, were gradually increased in

the years that followed.

The Guildhall restaurant continued after the war was over, but, in January 1949, there was a crisis when an outbreak of food poisoning occurred at Carlton Road School after a meal had been supplied from it. The fish cakes were found to be carrying the agent involved. The Medical Officer of Health submitted a report and recommended improving arrangements in the Guildhall kitchen. These recommendations were adopted but the supply of meals to schools was not resumed. The restaurant was finally closed in May 1949. It had been running at a considerable financial loss and the daily average of people eating in it had fallen to 147! Even so, it had served the people of Boston well for several years in a difficult period of this country's history and it was remembered with affection for many years by members of the local populace.



**Postcard of Boston Guildhall kitchen during its time as a National Kitchen.
Image kindly provided by Hilary Healey**

The Town's Museum

In 1924, fourteen paintings were bequeathed to the Corporation, together with a collection of Egyptian antiquities (which in the 1970s were sold to a museum in Edinburgh!). The following year, two locally made display cases were purchased and, in 1926, a museum was opened in the Municipal Buildings in West Street. The museum was transferred to the Guildhall in 1929, in which year the Corporation's Museum and Arts Committee recommended the purchase of six new show cases. One of the prominent members of this committee was George Hackford, an accomplished local photographer, water-colourist and collector, who had a passion for the history of Boston. Hackford was the Parish Clerk and a commercial photographer and donated many items of his work and collection to the museum.

In its early years, the museum relied heavily on voluntary assistance and donations and functioned without an appropriate collections policy, as museums have today. It continued to suffer from insufficient professional support for many years. From the mid-1950s until local government reorganisation in 1974, Bridget Robinson served as Borough Librarian and Museum Curator but was allocated only half a day a week at the Guildhall, which was otherwise left in the charge of a caretaker. The situation improved significantly in more recent years with a full-time curator and other full and part-time staff being appointed in 1986.

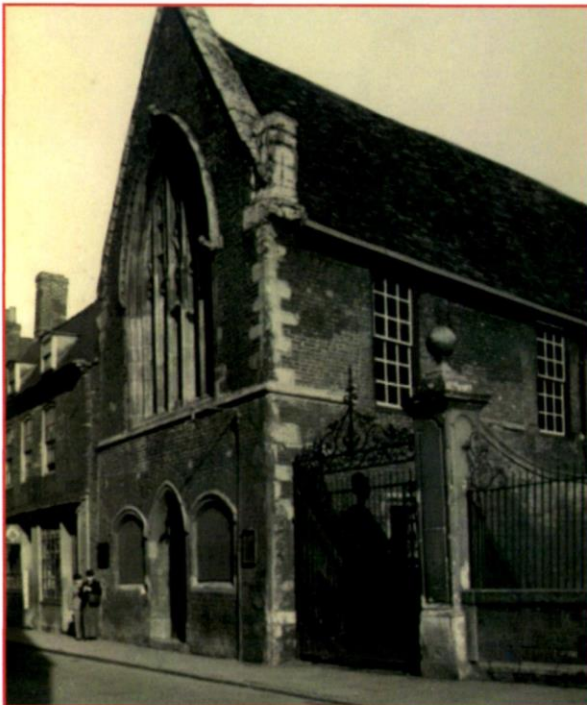
Since 1995 there has been a policy to focus on only acquiring items that are relevant to the locality in some way. Much of the collection was on permanent display in the Guildhall until it was closed in 2001. Today, a selection of the objects and works of art are on display in the Guildhall at any one time, with most of the remainder being stored at the Haven (the building on the other side of Fydell House) and accessible by arrangement. The collection includes some interesting items, including paintings by W.B.Thomas and S.G.Enderby, a copy of Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs' and artefacts from various local archaeological excavations.

Restoration

The Guildhall, which is Grade I listed, was closed in 2001. After extensive consultations about possible and future use, a funding package was put in place which was supported by the European Regional Development Fund, Heritage Lottery and the East Midlands Development Agency.

The whole roof was taken off and the south side restored with the best of the surviving medieval tiles and the north side with new specially made tiles. The remainder of the building was sympathetically restored and a new under floor heating system and a lift were installed. The present visitor attraction, which tells the story of the building and its place in Boston's history, was then put in place enabling the now named Boston Guildhall to finally reopen in 2008. It received the RICS Regional awards for Building Conservation

and Project of the Year also winning the title of Lincolnshire Museum of the Year in its first year of opening.



Postcard depicting the front of the Guildhall with the iron gates that were added in 1914
Boston Borough Council, Museum Collection

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